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# RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN PORTO RICO

## MISSIONS IN PORTO RICO

By Rev. Thomas Moody Corson  
Humacao, Porto Rico

The Blanche Kellogg Institute at Santurce, San Juan

By A. G. Axtell, Principal



American Missionary Association

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## RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN PORTO RICO



CONGREGATIONAL PORTO RICO

THE Federation of Evangelical Churches in Porto Rico held its Fifth Biennial Association at Ariciebo last December when it appeared that organized churches have been increased by 22 in the last two years. They number now about 208. The church buildings and chapels were increased 30, making a total beyond 260. Every town is occupied, and practically all important centers are.

Church membership has increased less rapidly owing to a weeding-out process and the high standards of membership now required. The total membership of the various protestant bodies in Porto Rico in full connection now approximates 12,000.

All reports agree that our evangelical work is developing wider opportunities. Communities formerly indifferent or opposed, now seek protestant services. The rural extension work is especially gratifying, and for the first time in its history—after 400 years—the Roman Catholic Church has begun to build rural chapels. This reversal of the policy of centuries is directly due to protestant example.

All missions report encouraging and sometimes extraordinary gains in the direction of self-support. Churches that formerly paid with difficulty for the mere lighting and heating of the buildings, now bear an appreciable part in the pastor's support, and give largely for missions.

A notable feature of the material advance of the work is that church buildings and parsonages being erected in the more important centers are almost universally of high quality, both architecturally and in adaptation of the building to the work. The United Brethren have acquired a Mission Headquarters at Ponce, the Methodists appear to be spending about \$20,000 a year for permanent improvements, parsonages of good quality are also

being erected and the protestant work in general is well on the way to being permanently and fittingly housed.

Unusually significant gains in the field of education have marked the past two years, in which each of the larger denominations share. The Methodists have developed their Industrial and Training school at Hattillo, with a \$16,000 building, and 34 boys enrolled at the time of the last printed report. The Baptists have operated their Training School in rented quarters at Rio Piedras, with Academic work related to the University of Porto Rico, enrolling sixteen pupils. It has chosen a site for a prospective \$18,000 building. A Girls' School is expected to be established in somewhat similar relations to the University under independent auspices. In Presbyterian territory and closely associated with Presbyterian interests, is the Polytechnic Institute of Porto Rico at San German. This institution has opened most auspiciously, and will serve the Presbyterian United Brethren fields in the general vocational lines of education of High School grades, while the special training of Christian workers is carried on in the Theological Seminary at Mayaguez.



A. M. A. CHURCH, FAJARDO

*The Congregationalists have considerably enlarged their school at Santurce, and have given it a more definite character of the Spanish-American institute largely patronized by the wealthier classes and volunteers of the Roman Catholic City.*

The weeding-out process which has been applied to church membership, has been even more stringent as applied to native Christian workers and in preparation for the ministry. Academic standards in the Theological schools have been raised, and a stronger type of native workers should soon be forthcoming.

Medical Missions have advanced less rapidly than could be wished. The United Brethren are happy in finding Christian physicians from the States for their two dispensaries. The Presbyterian hospital in San Juan has continued its unrivalled service, but has so far failed to secure its greatly needed new building. All denominations are greatly indebted to this hospital in behalf of their missionaries, as well as all Porto Rican people. A Presbyterian Hospital is under erection in Mayaguez also.

The Congregationalists have temporarily discontinued medical work in the conviction that it cannot be satisfactorily carried on without proper facilities, but funds are now in hand for a special medical building for residence and dispensary purposes, to be located somewhere on the Humacao field.

Encouraging progress in temperance organizations is reported from several quarters, and the circulation of the Scriptures under the American Bible Society has greatly increased.

As the children of twelve years of Evangelical work have grown into young manhood and womanhood, the more complete organization of church life is natural, and gains in Christian Endeavor and other young people's organizations are reported on all hands. The Evangelical publications of the various missions have steadily gained in quality and circulation and constitute a strong adjunct of the work.

In the establishment of a joint periodical by the Presbyterian, United Brethren and Congregational Missions, we have the PUERTO RICO EVANGELICO, a 16-page semi-monthly, of high quality, published by a board representing the three missions, with headquarters in Ponce.

The plan for making the Presbyterian Seminary at Mayaguez a joint institution of the Presbyterian and United Brethren has been carried out satisfactorily. The Congregationalists, who were also included in the earlier negotiations, count themselves unable to enter into formal relations in this project owing to the long distance be-

tween their field and that of the other bodies. They are, however, using the Mayaguez Seminary for the training of such ministerial candidates as are prepared to enter.



A. M. A. CHURCH, HUMACAO



## MISSIONS IN PORTO RICO

By Rev. Thomas Moody Corson, Humacao, Porto Rico

THE needs of the missionary field are always so vividly present to the workers there, that they sometimes dwell upon them, and neglect to tell of the encouraging and beautiful things in their work. This must not, however, lead one to forget how much encouragement is also to be found in the work, and how much is actually being accomplished. In writing of Porto Rico, therefore, I wish to speak of some of its delights as well as its needs.

For example, the climate is far from what many people expect of the tropics. For several months of every year the daytime temperature is about

70°, and the nights are cooler. The very hottest days are not so hot as those which we sometimes have in Boston or New York. In the hot season in Porto Rico, the temperature seldom rises above 95° in the shade. People from the north, however, usually need to return to the States every year or two for a taste of the more bracing atmosphere of the North.

The scenery in Porto Rico—the mountains with gorges deep—cut by the swiftly-flowing torrents of the rainy seasons, the valleys with their level lowlands, covered with sugarcane or perhaps tobacco or pineapples, the soft tints of the tropical skies, against which stand out in sharp relief the waving fronds of the cocoanut and royal palms—all this is very beautiful, a constant delight.

And in some of the straw-thatched huts on the sides of the mountains, the missionary is cordially welcomed. There are points in our Congregational territory four miles or more from the nearest church. In several of these we have services more or less frequently, at stated intervals, but in others we can preach only occasionally and in some places very seldom. The people at these points, however, are not only willing to listen to the preacher, but are anxious to have him come to them often.

Even a Roman Catholic family that lives about two miles from the nearest church, has often invited me to come out there to preach to them. On two occasions when I have been there, they have sent out to invite their neighbors, so that I have had about twenty Roman Catholics present at the service, in addition to protestants who went with me.

As a result of such services held by a former missionary, Rev.

Otto Scheibe, in the hills more than four miles from the Humacao church, about a dozen members from that neighborhood, joined the church. One of these is almost never absent from church on Sunday morning, even though on some occasions the mud will be more than a foot deep for the greater part of his four-mile walk.

Thus one may see that a great opportunity and privilege as well as a great responsibility is presented to us. The Congregational denomination is responsible for work among a population of more than 81,000. To do this work we now have eleven organized churches, and a few organized Sunday-schools at points where we have no churches as yet, one day school, a settlement house, and several preaching stations, with three missionary superintendents, one lady missionary, several teachers, and eight native workers. Most of our work is among the poorer classes, although



REV. T. M. CORSON  
Humacao, Porto Rico

it is not exclusively so. And as in the earthly life of our Master, the poor people heard him gladly, so now in Porto Rico the poor people to whom religion has not yet brought comfort and inspiration, are eager to hear from the protestant missionaries the good tidings of salvation.



## THE BLANCHE KELLOGG INSTITUTE AT SANTURCE, SAN JUAN

A. G. Axtell, *Principal*

**I**F the American Missionary Association follows the flag, which it does, even taking the flag to new places on its own initiative, it follows or takes it into strange places; into what are essentially foreign lands. As examples, we know of Hawaii, of Alaska and Porto Rico.



BLANCHE KELLOGG INSTITUTE AND CHAPEL

Porto Rico is essentially foreign; it is "occupied" indeed by the American government, and by those representing it; and it is to an extent possessed by Americans and those of other nationalities, but in every essential, of native language, of customs, of modes of thought, of religion, Porto Rico is yet Spanish to such a large extent that missions in this Island are essentially foreign missions. They have to do with the native population, who have been molded out of various origins in the mold of Spanish government, education and religion.

A school of any type, whether public or private, whether governmental or mission, must be Spanish-American, if it is to meet the needs and foster the interests of those who constitute the rising generation, whether rich or poor, high or low, prominent or obscure.

The Blanche Kellogg Institute, at Santurce, is constituted as a missionary educational institution to meet the needs of all classes; it is engaged in the solution of the exceedingly difficult problem of ministering to all classes. It is missionary, evangelical, in the midst of a Catholic people, it is an educational institution, and more; it is a religious institution. It has a school, a social settlement, and a church. The school is not divorced from religion, nor the settlement separated from education; and the church is the crown of its endeavor to serve in the name of the Master; to bring into the darkness the Light of the world.

It is best to think of the Blanche Kellogg Institute as consisting of two departments, one educational, the other evangelical. The educational department as now constituted is what has been known as the pay department; it is for those who are able to pay a part of the expense of their education. The social settlement is both educational and evangelical, but we class it with the evangelical department of work, for evangelical endeavors are closely linked with all its activities.

Educationally, the Institute is doing work extending through the eight grades of primary education, and two high school or secondary education grades, on the line of preparation for college. It affords music in a regularly graded system throughout; it offers private lessons in music. And what would be absolutely unique in education in the States, it offers Spanish in all the grades and the high school course; so that a student finishing the course here would be able to command a good position in a school or even a college offering Spanish; since he receives here a course of ten years in Spanish, extending not only into the grammar and rhetoric of the language, but into its literature as well. And if he is natively Spanish or Portorican, as the majority of our students are, there could be no question about his accent. Besides the emphasis laid on music and Spanish, by means of the commercial department special attention is given to mathematics, the course being shaped from the seventh grade to meet commercial requirements; then continued beyond the eighth grade in regular commercial lines. By means of thus specializing we are laying the foundation for a Spanish-American School of Languages and Commerce, the sort of school which, if properly capitalized and managed, should attract students not only from the Island but also from the States of North and South America.

The teachers employed at the Institute have always done more or less of what is known as settlement work. Yet this work has been heretofore secondary to the educational features. Now we are making it the leading feature of the free department. Our aim is to develop a settlement which shall have for its main object and line of effort, home-making and home-keeping. Under the efficient leadership of Miss Fairbanks, we have already organized a Village Improvement Society, a Mothers' Society, a Children's Society, and a Bible-study Class. A Chorus also meets every week, under the instruction of Miss Ulmer, our teacher of music.

On the last day of 1912, our new church was organized, with a membership of twenty-three, nineteen of whom were received on confession of faith. In this we had the indispensable aid of our Superintendents from our mission centers, Fajardo and Humacao, Rev. Mr. Corwin and Rev. Mr. Corson. In connection with the organization was held our first annual conference, to which came delegates and native workers from all our churches. Also a fellowship service was held, in which representatives

from the other churches of San Juan and environs came and gave us greetings and good wishes.

Our purely evangelical work consists of our Sunday-school, our neighborhood service on the "Melilla"—a section near us in which we are especially interested—our evening service of preaching in Spanish, very helpful and important and our Bible-study class; together with the ministrations of the pastor and visitors, and (we must clearly count these) the marriage service and the funeral. Both these services have been rare here; we are making them more common, and thus bringing the blessing of the Saviour upon most sacred and solemn occasions, which have too often been occasions of hilarity or unmitigated grief.

The problem of the best method of service to the people of Porto Rico has perhaps not yet been solved; yet we believe we are at work on lines which must bring large blessing upon them. We have yet to hear any criticism of our social settlement ideas and methods, while on the other hand we hear many words of unqualified approval. Missionaries, men of business, the Commissioner of Education, the Governor of Porto Rico, all commend our scheme of help in the line of home-making and home-keeping. It has been our own view that a settlement without a church is incomplete; indeed that it lacks the vital element. We therefore organized the church, and in this we have the approval of many who are alike interested in the welfare of those who live on this Island, our own consciences, and, we believe, of the Master himself. We have a number of candidates for the next communion. We trust also that our present work and our developing plans will meet the approval of the members of the Churches, Sunday-schools and Endeavor Societies of our own faith and order throughout the States. And if this article shall inspire its readers to offer a prayer for God's continued blessing upon our work we shall be encouraged; if among the many whom we know and the many more whom we do not know some shall find time to write us a word, or turn some offering in our direction, we shall be glad and grateful.

